

L. CARL BROWN. — *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey, 1837-1855*. Princeton University Press, 1974.

The expansion of European power in the world during the 19th Century, especially during the years of colonial imperialism after 1880, has been the subject of much scholarly and polemical debate. The social changes which European dominance brought about in non-European societies has attracted less attention, from historians at any rate. One reason for this is probably the traditional view of colonial history as predominantly "political" or "diplomatic," and therefore outside the scope of the social historian. Another is the way we look at lands that have emerged from colonial domination. We call them "developing countries" and tend to think that the process of modernization is something that has begun there only quite recently. Yet it takes but a moment to realize how groundless both these attitudes are. First of all, colonial rule was not simply the story of the *political* dominance of one people by another: it was just as much a question of the imposition of new forms of social organization, alien notions of property, modern patterns of economic activity — in short, all the structural innovations which usually demand the interest of social historians. Second, colonial rule in all of its aspects constituted a tremendous assault on the traditional societies which experienced it. It was the great stimulus which began to push non-Western areas into the modern world. Thus the origins of modernization are not to be found in post-war decolonization or the "development decades," but rather in the period of colonial dependence.

This generalization needs modification when it is applied to three of the Islamic states of the southern Mediterranean. Here the first stages of modernization had already been ushered in by rulers (one thinks immediately of Egypt's Muhammad Ali) determined on using Western technology to strengthen their own position so as to be able to resist more effectively the pressures of the Great Powers. This is just the kind of situation Professor Carl Brown deals with in his insightful study of Tunisia in the mid-19th century. His subject is the efforts of a small, traditional, "Third World" society to introduce and adapt European ways of doing things in order to cope with the encroachments of its Northern neighbours. He shows how the desire to avoid foreign domination necessitated the adoption of European know-how; and, in turn, how the emulation of Western ways posed the problem of social change *even before* formal colonial rule was imposed. In short, the book is a case study of attempts at modernization in a society that was, as the author puts it, "on the eve of being buffeted about and broken by outside influences, then later [i.e., under French rule] put back together in quite different form."

Brown begins his study with a description of Tunisian society in the mid-19th century, of the political élite that ruled over it and the religious establishment which guided its conduct. The key word here is segmentation. The men who carried on the tasks of government were a variegated lot, divided one from another by ethnic or tribal differences, functional specialization, and family connections. Rather than a simple picture of a unified governing class, what emerges is a small mosaic of disparate groups, each with its own sense of identity, each with its traditional claims to posts in the civil bureaucracy or military commands. Within this mosaic the functional differentiation of office tended to be reinforced by ethnic and class differences.

The million and a half people over whom the government ruled made up a similarly segmented society in which small-group loyalties — those of family, tribe, village, craft, or city neighbourhood — constituted the essential social realities. The most significant distinction within this larger mosaic was that which se-

parated town dwellers, with their settled ways of life and distinctive code of behaviour, from the peoples of the countryside. The latter, Brown points out, were almost completely the objects of government; for in Tunisia there was no native squirearchy which could defend rural interests at the power centre. (The consequence, of course, was that the peasantry paid the lion's share of state taxation.) Finally, the author emphasizes that within this traditional and segmented society only the Islamic religious establishment and the various Muslim brotherhoods (*zawiya*) served as an effective integrating force transcending small-group loyalties.

This was the polity and society which confronted Ahmak Bey, tenth ruler of the Husaynid dynasty, between 1837 and 1855.¹ In the second part of his study Brown describes the formation of the bey's personality, the Westernizing influences at his court, and the reforms he initiated. These ranged from symbolic gestures of Westernization (clothing, furniture, court etiquette) to substantial measures like the abolition of slavery. Most important, as might be expected, were the military reforms. The bey created a new army, complete with European uniforms and weapons, British and French advisers, an officer-training school, and a group of state industries to serve this military machine. The bey's army was recruited by the conscription of native Tunisians, a great innovation that provoked much popular hostility. Brown insists that here the government was crossing over, in a most forceful way, the line that had traditionally separated state from society and was thereby — whether it desired to or not — forcing one aspect of the modern nation-state on a pre-modern society.

These first tentative steps toward "modernization" failed. The military industry projects collapsed and the bey's new model army had to be disbanded in order to stave off bankruptcy. The economy never stirred from its traditional course: no entrepreneurial class sprang up, no cadre of skilled technicians remained after the state factories closed. Foreign consuls continued to chip away at Tunisian sovereignty and the bey was in no better position to resist them. Brown draws out very skillfully the lessons of these failures — and they seem contemporary lessons indeed. The bey's government had tried to import modern Western technology and harness it to traditional social and political structures without wanting to alter the latter in any way. "They failed to perceive that Western technical progress was inextricably linked to a whole way of life, and that the one could not be separated from the other for export abroad." Thus no intellectual debate preceded the reforms and no ideology of Westernization developed within the political élite. The traditional bureaucratic apparatus, itself divided and suspicious of the bey's reforms, had to impose these changes on Tunisian society without even thinking of seeking popular support for them. Therefore the reforms fell upon a conservative society which greeted them with bewilderment. This segmented society could not hope to resist the state's initiatives, but it could encapsulate them in a tissue of passive resistance which the government had neither the will nor the means to break. In the end Ahmad Bey's reforms stood in relation to traditional Tunisia as his spanking new naval frigate stood in La Goulette — stranded for lack of an adequate passage to the open sea.

Some questions remain. Any reader would want to know more about the structure of rural society or to have more details on the bey's creation of local industries to supply his reformed armed forces. Yet no historian can speak where his sources are relatively silent, and these are but minor drawbacks in a work

¹ In theory Tunisia was a province of the Ottoman Empire and the bey a vassal of the Porte. In practice Tunisia was autonomous and the beys acted as independent sovereigns most of the time.

where erudition is worn lightly and sociological jargon rejected in favour of finely-honed plain English. Indeed, in addition to all of its scholarly qualities, *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey* is the most carefully and gracefully written book that I have read in a long time.

E.P. FITZGERALD,
Department of History,
Carleton University.

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G. BENECKE. — *Society and Politics in Germany 1500-1750*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.

This work, the author tells us in the Preface, "attempts a new interpretation of the Holy Roman Empire in Germany from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century" (p. ix). It looks at the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation in this period not as the unfortunate legacy of a mythical Hohenstaufen failure, nor as a weak, chaotic conglomeration of competing territories and dynasties crying out for the 19th-century National Liberals' programme of centralization and rationalization, nor as the arena in which Austrian Hapsburgs and Prussian Hohenzollerns waged a power struggle for supremacy, the *kleindeutsche* and *machtpolitische* view. These views distort the picture. Benecke takes the stand that "Federalism is the main theme of German political history" (p. 23). His thesis is that the Holy Roman Empire in the early modern period evolved into a complex federal system, anomalous but viable, its viability arose largely out of the interdependence between the whole and its parts, especially those territories whose smallness precluded development into sovereign states and whose continued existence as independent units hung therefore on the survival of the empire.

This interpretation is not wholly original with Benecke, as he himself acknowledges in his historiographic survey in Chapter III. What is unique to Benecke's study is its foundation of exhaustive research carried out in state archives in north-west Germany. As Benecke proceeds from the assumption that "the federal Empire could only ever be as strong as its component territorial states wished," he concludes that "the parts have first and foremost to be studied in their own right" (p. ix). The latter two-thirds of his book contains the results of his research in the state archives of the county of Lippe. There he explores the relationship between territorial development and the regional and imperial-federal institutions of the early modern Empire. That section is preceded by one in which he examines the development of thirteen territories in north-west Germany, six ecclesiastical and seven lay, studied, he assures us in his Preface, not from the point of view of local history but rather from that of an analyst of a complex federal whole.

The weightiest section of Benecke's book is that devoted to Lippe. After surveying the composition of Lippe society, he examines the evolution of Lippe from an overlord's estate into a territorial state with the development of the machinery of state taxation. In the tug-of-war between Estates and dynastic rulers over taxation, absolutism was precluded, Benecke argues, by the mutual dependence of the contending parties, the ruler upon nobles and burghers as the dynasty's chief creditors, the nobles and burghers upon the ruling dynasty for repayment of their loans as well as for favourable tenure and offices.

Just as Benecke has found a close relationship between territorial taxation and the evolution of the territorial state, so he finds Lippe being drawn into the